

**Firms in drug effort thwart Congress' rules;□**

**Foreigners fly for U.S. in Colombia** Chicago Tribune, August 18, 2001

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DATELINE: BOGOTA, Colombia

The U.S. State Department has directed its largest private contractor in Colombia to hire foreign pilots to fight the drug war, an order that helps get around Congress' attempt to keep the United States from slipping further into the country's messy civil war.

Last year, Congress limited to 300 the number of civilian contract workers participating in U.S.-financed drug-eradication efforts in Colombia. But in a little-noticed decision, the State Department has counted only U.S. citizens toward that limit. As a result, DynCorp has 335 civilians working on the anti-drug campaign but fewer than one-third are U.S. citizens, the contractor's chief of operations in Bogota said Friday.

Those figures come on top of the estimated 80 U.S. citizens working for other companies involved in the drug-eradication effort, such as Bell Helicopter Textron, Sikorsky Aircraft, Northrop Grumman and Lockheed-Martin. So at least 400 contract workers in Colombia are paid as part of last year's \$1.3 billion aid package, although fewer than 200 are U.S. citizens.

A senior aide to Sen. Patrick Leahy (D-Vt.), who has been at the forefront of the battle over U.S. assistance to Colombia, acknowledged that the language passed by Congress specified that the cap applied to "United States individual civilians" and that the State Department was not obliged to include foreigners in their reports to Congress.

"Legally they may be within the law," said the aide, Tim Reiser. "But in terms of congressional interest in being informed on what U.S. money is being used for, that is of interest to Congress and it's something that the Congress should be informed about."

State Department officials say they are not required to inform Congress that they have ordered DynCorp to hire as many as 50 pilots from Guatemala, Peru, Colombia and other countries to transport Colombian troops into cocaine-growing zones.

The pilots, most of them former Latin American air force members who fly the most dangerous missions, also are hired to reduce the risk of bad publicity over the downing of a U.S. citizen, said U.S. Embassy officials.

U.S. lawmakers and aides contacted Friday accused the State Department of circumventing congressional intent to limit U.S. involvement in Colombia's 37-year civil war, in which leftist rebels and right-wing paramilitary forces depend on the cocaine trade for financing.

"This seems to be a loophole around the cap, a way to get around them," said Rep. Jan Schakowsky (D-Ill.), who has sought to eliminate the use of private contractors in the region since a U.S. company was involved in an accidental downing of a private airplane by the Peruvian military in April that killed a missionary and her daughter.

"Every time we find out more about what goes on in Colombia, a dozen more questions are raised," Schakowsky said.